

Message Text

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ACTION EA-06

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 NSC-05 NSCE-00 SP-02 L-01 PM-03

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7622

INFO CINCPAC HONOLULU

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGKOK 2189

LIMDIS

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, TH

SUBJECT: PRIME MINISTER KHUKRIT'S COMMENTS ON DOMESTIC AFFAIRS

1. PRIME MINISTER KHUKRIT PRAMOT MADE THE FOLLOWING COMMENTS OF INTEREST ON THE DOMESTIC POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC SITUATIONS DURING THE TWO-HOUR LUNCHEON WITH THE AMBASSADOR AND DCM ON FEBRUARY 2.

POSSIBILITY OF A MILITARY COUP

2. KHUKRIT SAID HE HAD JUST BEEN INFORMED BY THE THAI NSC STAFF THAT RETIRED GENERAL KRIT SIWARA, WITH THE HELP OF ARMY ASSISTANT COMMANDER IN CHIEF CHALAT HIRANYASIRI, MIGHT ATTEMPT TO SEIZE POWER THROUGH A MILITARY COUP BEFORE FEBRUARY 15. KHUKRIT SAID HE HAD DISCUSSED THIS POSSIBILITY WITH THE CURRENT ARMY COMMANDER IN CHIEF, GENERAL BUNCHAI, AND THAT BUNCHAI HAD ASSURED HIM THAT HE WOULD MAKE A PREEMPTIVE MOVE IF THERE WERE INDICATIONS THAT KRIT ACTUALLY PLANNED ACTION. KHUKRIT SAID HE WAS CLEARLY NOT INTERESTED IN EITHER OF THESE COUP POSSIBILITIES. IN THE CASE OF THE FIRST, HE ASSUMED HE WOULD BE ENTIRELY OUT OF A JOB AND IN THE CASE OF A COUP BY BUNCHAI

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HE WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY BE RELEGATED TO FIGUREHEAD STATUS.

3. THE AMBASSADOR SAID HE HAD HEARD NO REPORTS ABOUT POSSIBLE COUPS AT THIS TIME AND HAD NO INDICATION THAT EITHER KRIT OR BUNCHAI HAD THE WILL OR THE POWER TO CARRY OUT A COUP WITHOUT PROVOKING A GREAT DEAL OF VIOLENCE AND BLOODSHED. THE AMBASSADOR SAID IT WAS HIS PERSONAL VIEW THAT A MILITARY COUP WOULD HAVE PROFOUND IMPLICATIONS FOR THAILAND'S INTERNAL STABILITY AND WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY PRECIPITATE DEMONSTRATIONS BY STUDENTS AND OTHERS. KHUKRIT AGREED, NOTING THAT IN HIS OPINION A MILITARY COUP WOULD FURTHER POLARIZE THE POLITICAL SITUATION AND PLAY INTO THE HANDS OF THE COMMUNISTS. (COMMENT. WHILE THERE WAS A SPATE OF COUP RUMORS A FEW WEEKS AGO, THESE HAVE SUBSIDED. WE HAVE NOT HEARD THE REPORTS KHUKRIT MENTIONED AND DOUBT, IN PARTICULAR, THAT BUNCHAI HAS THE ABILITY OR DETERMINATION TO MOUNT A COUP, AT LEAST WITHOUT A CLEAR SIGNAL FROM THE KING. THESE REPORTS ARE SYMTOMATIC OF THE PRESENT POLITICAL UNCERTAINTY, AND IT IS NOTEWORTHY THAT THE PRIME MINISTER SEEMS TO ATTACH SOME IMPORTANCE TO THEM.)

4. ASKED IF HE THOUGH KRIT MIGHT BE WILLING TO JOIN A CIVILIAN DOMINATED GOVERNMENT AFTER THE ELECTIONS, KHUKRIT SAID HE DOUBTED KRIT WOULD ACCEPT WHAT ANY LIKELY GOVERNMENT WOULD OFFER. KHUKRIT SUMMARIZED HIS EARLIER EFFORTS TO ENTICE KRIT INTO THE GOVERNMENT PRIOR TO HIS RETIREMENT LAST OCTOBER. KRIT TURNED DOWN THE POSITIONS OF DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER, MEMBER OF THE PRIVY COUNCIL AND ADVISOR TO THE PRIME MINISTER, SAYING HE WOULD ONLY JOIN THE CABINET IF HE COULD TAKE OVER THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE. KHUKRIT REJECTED THESE TERMS AND THE TWO FINALLY AGREED THAT KRIT WOULD BECOME AN ADVISOR TO ISOC.

ELECTION PROSPECTS

5. KHUKRIT SAID HE WAS CONVINCED THAT THAILAND WOULD BE IN FOR SERIOUS TROUBLE IF THE ELECTIONS PRODUCED THE FROMER PROLIFERATION OF POLITICAL PARTIES. IN AN EFFORT TO PREVENT THIS, HIS PARTY (THE SOCIAL ACTION PARTY) AND THE CHAT THAI PARTY HAD ENTERED INTO AN ELECTORAL AGREEMENT IN WHICH THEY WOULD NOT COMPETE AGAINST EACH OTHER. IT WAS THEIR HOPE THAT THIS ELECTORAL ALLIANCE MIGHT GIVE THEM A MAJORITY AND ENABLE THEM TO FORM A VIABLE GOVERNMENT. KHUKRIT STRESSED HIS VIEW THAT ONE PARTY OR ELECTORAL ALLIANCE MUST GET A MAJORITY. HE

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PLEDGED TO "BEND BUT NOT BREAK THE LAW" AND USE EVERY LEGAL MEANS TO ACHIEVE THIS OBJECTIVE.

6. ASKED IF HE SAW ANY PROSPECT FOR A ROYAL DECREE LIMITING THE NUMBER OF POLITICAL PARTIES, KHUKRIT SAID THAT SUCH A DECREE HAD BEEN DRAFTED BY THE GOVERNMENT BUT THE KING HAD REJECTED IT AS VIOLATING THE CONSTITUTION. KHUKRIT NOW SAW NO PROSPECT FOR SUCH A DECREE.

7. KHUKRIT SAID THAT IF THE SOCIAL ACTION-CHAT THAI ALLIANCE FAILED TO ACHIEVE A MAJORITY, THEN HE HOPED THE DEMOCRAT PARTY WOULD EMERGE IN A MAJORITY POSITION. HE DOUBTED, HOWEVER, THAT THIS WOULD HAPPEN AND THOUGHT THAT IN ORDER TO FORM A GOVERNMENT THE DEMOCRATS WOULD HAVE TO FORM A COALITION WITH THE SOCIALISTS, AS INDEED THEY HAD ATTEMPTED LAST MONTH. HE ATTACKED SOCIALIST PARTY LEADER COLONEL SOMKIT SISANGKHOM AND KHAISAENG SUKSAI AS POLITICIANS WHO FOR ALL PRACTICAL PURPOSES FRONTED FOR THE COMMUNISTS. HE SAID HE DID NOT BELIEVE THE NEW FORCE WAS COMPLETELY CLEAN EITHER. A DEMOCRAT PARTY ALLIANCE WITH "THIS RIFF-RAFF" WOULD BE UNSTABLE AND WOULD PAVE THE WAY FOR A COMMUNIST TAKEOVER. KHUKRIT REITERATED HIS FIRM BELIEF THAT REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT MUST BE MADE TO WORK AND THAT A STABLE MAJORITY MUST EMERGE FROM THE ELECTIONS--NOT THE HODGEPODGE OF PARTIES HE WAS SADDLED WITH AFTER THE JANUARY 1975 CAMPAIGN. KHUKRIT STRESSED THAT HE DOES NOT BELIEVE THAILAND HAS TIME FOR FURTHER EXPERIMENTATION.

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ACTION EA-06

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INFO CINCPAC HONOLULU

S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 BANGKOK 2189

LIMDIS

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

SITUATION IN THE SOUTH

8. KHUKRIT, WHO HAD JUST RETURNED FROM A TOUR TO THE TROUBLED AREAS OF SOUTHERN THAILAND THE PREVIOUS DAY, SAID

THERE WERE TWO MAJOR DIFFICULTIES IN THAT AREA: THE MUSLIMS WANTED SPECIAL PRIVILEGES BUT WERE RELUCTANT TO ACCEPT THE OBLIGATIONS OF THAI CITIZENSHIP, AND LOCAL OFFICIALS IN THE REGION HAVE HISTORICALLY INSISTED ON CONVERTING THE MUSLIMS INTO "GOOD LITTLE BUDDHISTS." KHUKRIT SAID HE HAD DECIDED TO END CERTAIN SPECIAL PRIVILEGES FOR MUSLIMS WHICH SET THEM APART, SUCH AS AN ARRANGEMENT UNDER WHICH MUSLIMS HAVE BEEN ADMITTED TO UNIVERSITIES IN THE SOUTH WITHOUT TAKING THE ENTRANCE EXAMINATION. NOW THEY WOULD HAVE TO LEARN THAI AND COMPETE ALONG WITH EVERYONE ELSE. AT THE SAME TIME, KHUKRIT HAD AGREED THAT THE SEPARATE MUSLIM RELIGIOUS SCHOOLS (LIMITED TO TEACHING RELIGIOUS SUBJECTS AFTER REGULAR SCHOOL HOURS) COULD CONTINUE TO FUNCTION WITHOUT RTG INTERFERENCE. THE PRIME MINISTER SAID HE HAD ALSO PLEDGED TO THE PEOPLE IN THE SOUTH AN ALL-OUT EFFORT TO STABILIZE FARM PRICES AND TO SUPPRESS BANDITRY IN THE REGION. ASKED FOR HIS OVERALL ASSESSMENT HE SAID HE BELIEVED THE SITUATION IN YALA AND NARATHIWAT WAS COMING

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ALONG WELL BUT PATTANI, WHERE THERE HAVE RECENTLY BEEN DEMONSTRATIONS AND BLOODSHED, WOULD TAKE TIME.

NEED FOR VILLAGE ACTION

9. TURNING TO ONE OF HIS FAVORITE THEMES, KHUKRIT SAID MUCH GREATER EFFORT MUST BE MADE TO WIN OVER THE PILLAGERS AND GIVE THEM A FAIR DEAL. THE PRESENT POLITICAL PARTIES HAVE VIRTUALLY NO CONTACT WITH THE VILLAGERS, AND THE PEOPLE OF THAILAND NEED AN ADDITIONAL UNIFYING IDEOLOGY. IN AN EFFORT TO IMPROVE THIS SITUATION, KHUKRIT SAID HE HAS MET SEVERAL TIMES WITH OTTO VON HAPSBURG, ARCHDUKE OF AUSTRIA, WHO IS NOW VISITING BANGKOK AS ADVISOR TO THE HANNS SEIDEL STIFTUNG IN WEST GERMANY. HE HOPES AS A RESULT OF THESE DISCUSSIONS TO DEVELOP A POLITICAL EDUCATION AND POLITICAL ACTION PROGRAM FOR THE THAI IN OUTLYING AREAS--AND PROBABLY PARTICULARLY FOR HIS OWN PARTY WHICH HAS ITS MAJOR BASE OF SUPPORT OUTSIDE BANGKOK.

ECONOMIC MATTERS

10. ASKED ABOUT THE IMPACT OF THE RECENT INCREASE IN THE GUARANTEED PRICE FARMERS RECEIVE FOR THEIR RICE, KHUKRIT SAID HE THOUGHT THIS HAD A HIGHLY BENEFICIAL EFFECT. FEW FARMERS WERE ACTUALLY GETTING THE 2500 BAHT PER TON OF PADY PROVIDED UNDER THE NEW REGULATIONS BUT THEY WERE GETTING MORE THAN THEY HAD A YEAR AGO. AS A RESULT, THEY WERE CONTENT. THE MAIN PROBLEM NOW WAS TO FIND A WAY TO TAKE CARE OF THE URBAN POPULATION IN BANGKOK WITHOUT SUBSIDIZING THE WELL-TO-DO. TO MEET THIS, KHUKRIT SAID HE FAVORED AN ARRANGEMENT UNDER WHICH POORER FAMILIES--HE SAID THIS WOULD PROBABLY BE LIMITED TO THOSE EARNING LESS THAN 2,00 BAHT PER MONTH--WOULD BE ABLE

TO BUY CHEAP RICE WHILE OTHER WOULD BE REQUIRED TO PAY THE
REGULAR COMMERCIAL RATE.

11. ASKED ABOUT POSSIBLE STATE OWNERSHIP OF CERTAIN BASIC
MEANS OF PRODUCTION, KHUKRIT SAID HE SAW NO NEED FOR SUCH
DRASTIC ACTION. HIS GOVERNMENT AND HIS PARTY FELT THAT THE
MARKET MECHANISM PROVIDED A BETTER MEANS FOR RUNNING THE
ECONOMY THAN A LOT OF GOVERNMENT BUREAUCRATS. HIS GOVERNMENT
EVEN PLANNED TO INTRODUCE SOME PRIVATE OWNERSHIP FOR PRESENT
STATE ENTERPRISES BY ESTABLISHING A HOLDING COMPANY WHICH
WOULD CONTROL THE GOVERNMENT'S SHARE OF ALL PUBLIC ENTERPRISES
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AND WHICH WOULD ITSELF SELL SHARES TO THE PUBLIC THROUGH THE
BANGKOK STOCK EXCHANGE.
WHITEHOUSE

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